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Chile: Aylwin's Game Plan on Letelier

Aylwin sees the Letelier case as the greatest obstacle to close ties to Washington. He has a two-part strategy he hopes will be acceptable to the US without alienating the Chilean military:

- [REDACTED] Chilean officials [REDACTED] are prepared to indemnify the Letelier family by an amount to be set by an international commission.
- The government has also launched an investigation inside the Foreign Ministry of a related case that charges officials of the Pinochet government with forging passports for the murderers. Aylwin intends to put that case, recently reopened in a military court, under a civilian judge.

Although the judge could bring murder charges against former intelligence chief Contreras, who has been indicted in the US for the murder, Aylwin is said to oppose such a move for now and has ruled out his extradition to the US, fearing Contreras would implicate Pinochet. Aylwin nevertheless hopes Washington will see his good-faith efforts within the limits of Chilean political reality as evidence of intent to resolve the case and will lift sanctions soon.

[REDACTED]

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Special Analysis

CHILE:

Aylwin Seeking To Defuse Human Rights Issue

President Aylwin, in the first major test of his administration, is having problems balancing demands to redress past human rights abuses with the need to avoid confrontation with the military.

After weeks of consultations, Aylwin last week established a commission to investigate abuses of the Pinochet era, including the disappearance of some 750 people, and to determine the compensation for victims' families; it has no power to subpoena witnesses or to participate in future trials. [REDACTED] Aylwin hopes the narrow mandate of the commission will limit prosecutions of military personnel to the most egregious cases. Aylwin has said publicly that, once the truth is known, he will consider pardons. [REDACTED]

To appease far-left groups demanding quick action, Aylwin pardoned 46 political prisoners on assuming office in March. He also has introduced legislation to dismantle the repressive legal structure of the Pinochet regime. [REDACTED]

Most Chileans have applauded Aylwin's prudence, but the main center-right party has publicly questioned the commission's legal mandate and warned it could trigger conflict with the military. The party's legislators are delaying the proposed judicial reforms, apparently out of fear of unleashing the far left. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Far-left terrorists last month tried to assassinate a former Junta member widely associated with the abuses, compounding Aylwin's dilemma. [REDACTED]

Recent developments in the case of the murder in Washington of former Chilean Ambassador to the US Letelier in 1976 may complicate Aylwin's efforts. The case implicates many of the same Pinochet regime officials responsible for abuses in Chile. Revelations in the Chilean press by a woman who claims she was involved in the plot have provoked calls from across the political spectrum for a full investigation. [REDACTED]